**How the Working Conditions of Online Teaching Affect the Worklives on Online Faculty: Report from the COCAL/UALE Working Group on Online Learning Survey, October-December 2012**

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The headlines about online instruction change almost too fast to keep up with. A few months ago, MOOCS (Massive Open Online Courses) were news. This week (May 1, 2013) the New York Times reports that twelve out of a cluster of colleges that had signed up with Semester Online have backed off (Lewin 2013) and today, May 3, there is a headline, “Professors at San Jose State Criticize Online Courses” (Lewin 2013). The news is no longer about the wonders of technology. It is also less and less about access, the focal issue of the first few months of the year. Now the news is about faculty concern about long-term impacts of MOOCS on campus culture, the potential to hire fewer professors, and general lack of consultation by college administrations.

This concern is justified. Throughout this ongoing shake-up of higher education, as the potential of online teaching and learning becomes an actuality for more and more institutions, students and faculty, how these changes affect the worklives of faculty has been outside the spotlight. Certainly, there are innumerable “how-to” and “best practice” publications, trainings, and seminars, mainly focused on how to best keep the good points of face-to-face teaching while also taking advantage of the reach and intensity of distance learning. But these are about what is possible, not what is actually going on. What is it really like to teach on line? What kind of professional life does an online faculty member lead? Does the art of teaching survive into online delivery? Or, to put it more directly, what are the working conditions of online faculty? If we accept the familiar adage that faculty working conditions are student’s learning conditions, what are those working conditions?

In the New York Times article (from April 30, 2013), Tamar Lewin writes:

Any wholesale online expansion raises the specter of professors being laid off, turned into glorified teaching assistants of relegated to second-tier status, with only academic stars giving the lectures (Lewin, April 30, 2013 A3)

“Glorified teaching assistants” may be what Lewin means when she describes “online mentors [who] work in shifts at Udacity’s office in nearby Mountain View, Calif, waiting at their laptops for the “bing” that signals a question, and answering immediately.” She writes that one of these mentors said, “’We get to hear the ‘aha’ moments, and these all-caps messages, ‘THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU,” said Rachel Meltzer…” Is this the future of the professional life of online faculty? Some faculty think so. Lewin quotes a professor at San Jose State:

I would basically be a teaching assistant, and my students, unlike those at Harvard, could not question their professor (Lewin May 2, 2013 A12).

She also notes that “Most faculty objections arise out of concerns about how online courses impinge on the professor-student relationship – and how they may lead to the privatization of public universities and loss of faculty jobs” (Lewin May 2, A12).

To answer the question, “What are the working conditions of Online Faculty?” COCAL (the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor) authorized a survey at its August 2012 conference in Mexico City, as a joint project with the Online Learning Working Group of UALE, the United Association for Labor Education. This article reports the findings of that survey. The answer is, essentially, yes: the process of putting courses on line does lend itself to a course becoming increasingly “automated,” to use the language of one professor, and to it being passed on to adjuncts, some paid as little as less than $2,000 per class, to “facilitate,” under pressure of time and without substantive evaluation. This concern is raised by faculty at both ends of the status spectrum, from full-time tenured professors at state universities to adjuncts teaching multiple courses and multiple institutions including the for-profits. At the upper end of the spectrum, faculty speak of a “concern.” At the bottom end, faculty confirm that the concern has become the reality.

**The COCAL/UALE Survey**

This survey written to be sent out on SurveyMonkey, vetted by COCAL committee volunteers, and distributed in early October 2012. It was picked up by various academic organizations and discussion lists (MLA, UALE, XMCA and others, including academic unions) and rolled from one online academic community to another. By early December with 132 respondents we decided to begin the analysis. (A collector is still available at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/M8DYDMH>)

This report does not claim that the survey reached a random sample of who teaches online. Instead, it tells what our respondents said. However, because of the variety of institutions (107) from different states (36) and from all four sectors (state universities, non-profit private colleges and universities, community colleges and for-profits) these responses very likely depict a range of real-life situations which covers the range of the majority of online faculty.

Following is a thumbnail summary of what we found:

* 132 people responded. Initially, the response was slow but then grew steadily for two months. The survey appeared to be passing from one institution to another, via word of mouth, possibly among people who work at more than one institution.
* 107 different institutions were represented. We were looking for conditions at a workplace, not conditions of individuals, so one response per institution was as good as 10. We only got repeats from a few places (U Mass campuses, U of Illinois, Indiana U for example).
* Responses came from 36 different states. We identified states by the location of the institution. For-profits/totally online schools were located by contact information on the web or by the city supplied by the respondent. Seven people declined to give any information about institution or location.
* 6 respondents come from institutions in other countries, where the division into full-time and contingent/adjunct faculties seems to be much like what has happened in the US. Four of these were from York University or George Brown in Toronto. Others came from Alberta and Newfoundland in Canada, Japan and Israel.
* 53 responses came from faculty at state colleges and universities;
* 22 came from faculty at community colleges;
* 11 came from faculty at private non-profits (traditional liberal arts colleges);
* 29 came from private for-profits;
* 16 respondents declined to identify their institution by name.
* Status: 49 respondents were full-time faculty, whether tenure-track or contingent. The question was, “What is your status when you teach this course?” So someone answering, “Full-time faculty” would be teaching this class as part of a regular faculty load. We also asked how many other classes someone was teaching at the same time. We did not distinguish between full-time tenure track and full-time contingent since the issue was how much institutional support they got. Access to overall benefits and university or college resources was likely to be more or less similar although job security is not.
* 12 came from full-time faculty who were adjuncting on top of their full-time jobs. It’s not unusual for faculty who have full-time jobs to take online adjunct jobs at other institutions at the same time. Sometimes the full-time job is an administrative job, but mostly, these are people who teach full-time in one job and online as an adjunct for another school. The home institution covers the overhead for the work done at other institutions, so in that way, their access to university resources is taken are of by their home institution.
* 39 were adjuncts who were teaching at only one school. If someone is teaching at only one institution, but as an adjunct, they must have some other sources of income. We didn’t ask these people where their main source of income was. Some were teaching one course, some were teaching two. The maximum someone doing this could make would be $4,000 per course (with a couple of exceptions). If they taught 5 classes a year they might make $20,000. We assumed that they were subsidizing their professional academic life with other income.
* 32 were adjuncts who were teaching at more than one school. Among these were people teaching three, four, five and more than six classes at a time. We assumed that these people were trying to make a living teaching and had no significant other source of income with which to subsidize their academic professional life. These people were usually barely able to survive.

**Two Categories of Working conditions: “Professional concerns” and “Pay and benefits”**

To depict the working conditions of our respondents, we divided the conditions into issues that do not translate directly into wages and things that do, that are part of what someone gets paid, like wages and benefits. We called the first “Professional Concerns” and the second, “Pay and benefits”.

**Professional concerns: Control of the work**

Professional concerns were primarily about control of the work. In the traditional discourse of academia, this is also known as “academic freedom.” While academic freedom traditionally includes the fundamental right to teach what and how you believe to be right within the bounds of your discipline and your expertise, and to speak the truth as you know it without fear of retaliation, it has a more concrete meaning when we are talking about online teaching. In this context is means whether you write the class you teach or someone else does, or whether you write it and someone else teaches it. It also means being allowed to change the class (if you wrote it) or being allowed to edit, update or change if it you didn’t. It also has to do with the degree of autonomy and freedom one has in responding to students’ questions and criticisms. Since one of the aspirations of a professional life in teaching is to hope to teach a course ongoing into the future, job security is also a professional concern, as is ownership of copyright (much as faculty own copyright to a book they write) and evaluation. Therefore we asked people whether they wrote the class they teach or if it was a collaborative project, whether they could expect to teach the class in the future, and whether they were required or free to update or edit it. These questions also asked about professional development, access to research assistance, readers or graders. These are types of professional support that are typical of full-time tenure track or even contingent full-time status.

“Academic freedom” and “the art of teaching” are phrases that sound as if they come from a different world than “control of the work.” Yet thinking about professional concerns in terms of control of the work helps us recognize parallels between teaching and other kinds of work. Control of the work, meaning safety, decency and respect for what a worker knows, as well as being able to take pride in quality, is a concern shared by all workers, even routine workers. As online faculty see themselves more and more as routine workers, “control of the work” becomes a clearer issue.

**Control of the work: Concerns across the entire range of responses**

Because status in an educational institution is closely linked to control of the work, we sorted responses by status where appropriate, distinguishing between full-time and adjunct faculty. Both adjuncts who only teach at one institution and adjuncts who teach at many share lack of access to the institutional resources that come with a full-time job. A person with independent resources can subsidize a low-wage adjunct teaching job financially but still be unable to access the professional privileges of the academic world. What these two levels of status in have in common is exclusion from the collegial culture of the college.

A senior full-time tenured faculty member at a state university describes faculty unwillingness to develop online classes because of potential loss of control of the course content and delivery. He/she describes a concern about the “adjunctivization” of a course:

The University is currently facing a lawsuit from two of my colleagues who recently moved to another institution. Before they left, they developed an extensive online course, including videos and the like. It would be swell if I could get that kind of support for my online course development, but I am not holding my breath. At any rate, the lawsuit from my former colleagues came about as they discovered that the course they developed was now being offered, unaltered, by an adjunct hired for that purpose. This situation has an extreme dampening effect on the willingness of full time faculty to develop online classes.

He/she goes on to describe what would be missing from the “adjunctivized” version of his/her course:

One of my greatest concerns has to do with involving my graduate students in teaching my classes. I would do so, and several have hinted that they would like to join me in teaching a very popular class that I have developed. If I do so, however, I feel quite confident that the class materials would be used to present online versions of the same class, but without those features that have made the class so popular with students: that I mix in substantial face-to-face and online elements, effectively offering the educational ideal of a well-planned hybrid class, for a face to face group, with very substantial feedback on writing. This sort of class could not be effectively offered for a large group (the class size is currently 35, the most that can fit in a classroom), but the university would be delighted to turn this into a class for 100-200 students or more, to standardize and water it down. [The] University is interested in online instruction as it wants to gain tuition dollars and increase the number of degrees that it grants. There is little-to-no attention to whether students learn. Teaching awards go to people who have tiny classes in the sciences and make the President and Provost look good in one way or another.

The fear of this faculty member has been realized by this other one, also full-time tenure-track faculty member at a different state university*:*

I developed a course I am no longer allowed to teach. It is now taught by who knows who (I am not involved in the hiring of adjuncts) without any coordination. My materials are being used by instructors without copyright protection. Only one has contacted me to “pick my brain” (his words)

Compare this with these words from adjuncts. These are people to whom such classes have been passed along. This is from an adjunct teaching at a community college while employed full-time at another institution*:*

Online instructors are given no opportunity to make choices about the course material and coverage. No one seems to be interested in learning about discipline specific research.

An adjunct describes how far outside the decision-making process or culture of his/her institution they feel. To them, it is a riddle or a closed book. Here is an adjunct who works at a branch of Art Institute (a for-profit*)*

The institution is very opaque and there is very little discussion about policy. It is corporate run with a top-down hierarchical structure where faculty have very little understanding of how and why decisions are made and very little interaction with administrators, lead faculty or other faculty members.

And this one, an adjunct teaching at Argosy (a for-profit) as well as other institutions, does not attempt to keep control of his/her work, but is just trying to survive:

Many of the students are ill-prepared even for a remedial class. The class is only 5 weeks, so it's very hard for challenged students to learn what they need. I am micro-managed and have to follow rigid rules about grading. The amount of work required is far out of proportion to the amount paid for that work.

**Overall attitude toward distance education**

But are faculty fundamentally cynical about online teaching and learning? No. We asked several questions intended to allow respondents to tell us their attitude to the work they were doing. Since this was not our main focus, we kept this section brief. However, since there are many arguments in favor of distance learning we asked if they would give any or all of the following reasons why their course is taught on line.

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| **Responses** | **Reason for putting a class on line** |
| 70 | To reach a geographically dispersed population |
| 68 | To bring in new sources of tuition revenue |
| 50 | To supplement face-to-face traditional education |
| 40 | To solve budgetary problems connected to brick-and-mortar classroom costs (replacing physical classrooms) |
| 35 | To expand course offerings beyond the core curriculum |
| 25 | To increase class size over what is possible in a face to face class |

The two top explanations were reaching geographically dispersed populations and bringing in new sources of tuition revenue. People acknowledged good reasons to put a course on line. Elsewhere in the survey, they gave examples of dispersed populations including students dislocated by disasters, students in cold climates who would not travel during the winter, mature or elderly students who do not drive, people who need to flex classes around their jobs, and “degree completers” who had moved away from the area.

But they also noted the new sources of tuition revenue enabled by distance learning. An adjunct wrote:

Also, we have a problem with students registering for courses to get financial aid without any intention of taking or completing the course, this is skewing the attrition data or student success completion rates.

A full-time contingent faculty member wrote:

It is clear that the school is mostly interested in increasing enrollment and getting more tuition money than it is in evaluating whether student should be admitted to class and whether students can do work. Many borderline students [are] in [the] course.

Another adjunct wrote:

I earn less than WalMart wages and am not able to encourage many students to go on to graduate school. They earn more than I do and literally say, why should I end up like you? This situation is appalling. Plus what SUNY exploits from me in terns of the difference between what the students pay and what I am paid actually supports the administrators who hire me.

**Value of Teachers’ Expertise to the Mission of the Institution**

We asked for a true/false response to the statement, “I believe that this course, and the expertise that I bring to teaching is, is an indispensible contribution to the mission of the institution where I teach.” Of those who responded to this, (78 out of 132), 64 or 82% answered “true.” An assumption implied by “indispensible” is mutual commitment. The belief that one is making a unique and valued contribution can mask a lot of dissatisfaction on other levels. However, among those who answered “false,” adjuncts outnumbered full-time faculty two to one.

An example of “indispensible” contribution comes from full-time faculty member at a private non-profit university whose students were dispersed by Hurricane Katrina. This is a faculty person who gets institutional support for this program:

Ours is a graduate program. Since Hurricane Katrina some of our students are STILL dispersed. That is why each course in our program is on campus as well as online. [Our students] visit the city from time to time and so they get to meet their faculty members and other students. The two [versions of the class] count as one class. We designed this ourselves. Some faculty have been paid in the past. It is $1,000 to 2,000. I defer to younger faculty to be paid. Remember, we teach each class to one group on campus and another much smaller group online. Usually the on campus class is 10 - 15. The online is usually 3 - 5. At most 7.

Lack of institutional support is expressed by an adjunct teaching at the University of Phoenix, a for-profit. He/she “loves the students” but has misgivings about what they are getting by way of education, despite his/her efforts to “do my best to create a dynamic learning environment…” The tone of this respondent is one of someone doing important work but frustrated to the point of desperation.

I love the students. They are diverse and many are hardworking, although often seriously under-prepared for college-level courses. I feel that the quality of education they receive at the University of Phoenix is inferior to what they would get in a public university, community college, or in face-to-face classroom settings at another institution. University of Phoenix delivers a formulaic, cardboard cut-out style of education. In spite of this, I do my best to create a dynamic learning environment for students and to help them as best as I can. As far as working conditions go, I feel entirely disconnected from the University, despite spending over [x] years there. I know no one there personally and would have no idea who to ask for a reference. I feel extremely "used" by the system, even more so than in other adjunct positions I've held. I alter some assignments, but largely follow the "shell" course the university provides. I am permitted to make changes, but there is a lot of pressure to strictly follow the university's guidelines; I am therefore hesitant to do so for fear of losing my job.

**Authorship and Editing/Updating**

An example of being able to control one’s work is writing a class. Classes were likely to be written originally by full-time faculty. Half of adjunct responders did not write the courses they teach. Instead, they taught courses written by other people.

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| **Status** | **Did you write the class you teach?** |
| Full-time (n=49) | 35 said yes, 4 said it was a collaborative effort |
| Adjunct (n=71) | 34 said yes, 8 said it was a collaborative effort, 29 said no |
| Adjunct with other FT job (n=12) | 8 said yes, 4 said it was collaborative, 4 said no. |

If someone else wrote the class, could a teacher update or edit the class? Nearly all answered yes to this, but adjuncts, especially at for-profits, reported that the updates were minimal because the courseware was proprietary.

Here is an adjunct at a for-profit who also teaches at multiple institutions, teaching a proprietary course and has almost no control of his or her class:

I am not allowed to update [this course], although I can tweak most assignments for a specific group of students as long as weekly objectives are still met. The students are often unprepared for college; while that is nothing unusual, it does mean a higher attrition rate -- frustrating, but at least it does not affect pay.

**Copyright**

US copyright law says that once something has been written down, a copyright for that item exists. Registering with the copyright office brings, in addition, the right to sue for damages. Copyright is a bundle of different rights that can be sold, given or licensed exclusively or non-exclusively, separately or together. Academic authors typically keep copyrights or release them to a publisher via separate contract. The institution does not automatically own the copyright to something written by faculty. If a faculty member has sold a copyright to an institution, that agreement exists in a contract.

We asked respondents to tell us whether, if they wrote their course, who owned copyright.

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| **Status** | **I own copyright** | **The institution owns copyright** | **Don’t know** |
| Adjuncts | 6 | 19 | 27 |
| Full-time | 9 | 12 | 12 |

One full-time faculty person owns the copyright to the online class which he/she wrote, but has licensed it to the university for a specific use. Yet another says that he/she declined payment for writing a class, in order to keep it from being a “work for hire” that would belong to the institution. The high number of faculty who do not know who owns copyright to their class suggests an opportunity for addressing faculty concerns about control of how their materials are used.

**Job security**

Continuity in teaching a class is important for developing the course to include current disciplinary advances and for revising a course to anticipate the needs of students. However, as we noted above, even full-time faculty can have their classes given away. For adjuncts, uncertainty is normal.

We asked people if they could expect to teach this class in the future and gave them a choice between “No,” “Yes, by past practice,” and “Yes, by contract”. Without union representation, past practice is unenforceable and depends entirely on the cooperation of one’s supervisor. This suggests problems for the 35 respondents who said they had expectations of keeping their class into the future despite not having union representation, and the 13 who may have a contract but do not have a seniority right written into it.

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| **Do you have a seniority right to teach this class in the future?** | **By contract?** | **By past practice?** |
| Yes (60 out of 132)  No (72) | 6 | Yes, from 54, of whom 35 did not have union representation. Presumably, 13 (54-35- 6 = 13) have a contract but no seniority right to teach a class is written into it. |

An adjunct at a for-profit wrote:

I am faced with complete uncertainty regarding whether I will be assigned the class in the future. Even though I have been with the institution for 8 years, there is no guarantee that I will receive an assignment from quarter to quarter.

An adjunct at a state university who also teaches at a non-profit private college in another state wrote:

There is no job security. I taught at SUNY for five years, received a certificate thanking me for five years of service, and was cut to two courses from three. I am called part time but for five years have taught eight courses a year which is full time. My load is greater than full time.

**Union representation**

The 85 respondents who said they had union representation were from community college systems in California and Washington State, state universities in California, Oregon, Florida, Illinois and Massachusetts and CUNY and SUNY in New York. We probably reached this high number because the origins of the survey were through COCAL, a union-related organization, and UALE, the United Association for Labor Education. These were also, as is shown in a table in the next section, the institutions (especially the state universities) with the highest pay. No one at a for-profit or a private non-profit reported union representation. All the overseas respondents (Canada, Japan, Israel) reported having union representation. We also asked if there were or had been attempts to organize at places that were not currently organized. Places responding “Yes” included University of Illinois Springfield and UMUC in Maryland. Several respondents said, “We need a union,” etc.

**Evaluations**

Anyone interested in quality should care about how it is measured. This means evaluations.

We asked how our respondents were evaluated. Online instruction is unfortunately well suited to the “black box” approach, which measures input and output but omits what goes on in a classroom. Input includes class size and any pre-class selection process, such as pre-requisites. Output includes attrition, drop out rate, grades and student complaints or feedback forms. All of the approaches below, except for the last one, would be considered “black box” approaches, but even last one would also have to include classroom visits or their online equivalent by colleagues.

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| **Evaluation type** | **Full-time (n=49)** | **Adjunct**  **(n=83)** |
| I am not evaluated | 2 | 3 |
| Students fill out a feedback form (for 48 respondents, this was the only form of evaluation) | 37 | 62 |
| My supervisor spots checks the course and reviews student evaluations | 9 | 23 |
| “Squeaky wheel” – evaluated only when there is a problem | NA | 11 |
| Individual instructors and courses, including student feedback, are reviewed and evaluated by administration | 16 | 11 |
| Faculty meet together and evaluate courses and instructors | 5 | 0 |

“Black box” evaluations were predominant. Although 39 respondents said that online instructors meet in person or using distance technology this was apparently not for the purpose of evaluation.

When we asked what happens when a student makes a complaint, only one person responded with the possible answer, “I am not re-hired.”All the rest of the responses, from both adjuncts and full-time faculty, were “Nothing,” or “My supervisor talks it over with me and we resolve it in a positive way” or “My supervisor backs me up.”

The “comments” section allowed people to give a few more details. Several said they were unaware of any evaluation process: “Not sure what the process is.” Or: “In reality, I don’t know if I am evaluated because I never hear anything about it.” One person said, “Without job security from the union contract, I’d have been fired several years ago.”

An adjunct who teaches at more than one institution in the California Community College system wrote:

My chair was figuring out how to evaluate me for the first time this semester. I haven't asked what the solution was.

“Black box” evaluations, even using multiple features, are not very good measures of what goes on in a class. When the only measure is student evaluations, the instructor has incentives to pander to students. A visit to a website by a tech administrator (one of the approaches mentioned in the comments section) may evaluate the website but not the teacher. Furthermore, some instructors report having downloaded a proprietary class (ePearson, for example) and merely adapted it. Yet if anything touches upon “quality,” the focus of so much discussion of online teaching, evaluations do.

If attrition, drop rates and grades are used as a basis for evaluations, what the teacher contributes to what comes out of the black box may be negligible compared to other causes. An adjunct teaching at a community college as well as multiple other institutions wrote:

The biggest challenge is student attrition. Many students are not prepared for time management or the ability to communicate via written form, so there is high attrition.

A full-time tenured faculty teaching overload at his/her home institution noted the same problems:

Many students that enroll drop the course or never actually get on Blackboard to join the course and do the coursework. It seems that many students take [an online] course because they think it is easier than during a fall or spring term and so this ends up being a highly disappointing aspect for them when it is not easier. Also, as a result of being paid for this course less per hour than my regular term courses, I have tended to automate all assignments and tests to minimize effort. This has meant much less for students in terms of pedagogical outcomes. However, there have been no student complaints about such automation and relatively rare direct engagement. The times when students reach me, however, are very intense in terms of exchanges by email that entail what would occur in a classroom scenario, or as close to that as feasible, with a lot of explanations, clarifications, and so forth, that can take not a few hours per student.

Note that this person (full-time tenured) has enough personal control over his/her work to choose to automate grading, as well as the skill to do it.

**Pay and benefits**

Full time faculty, of course, did not report per-class pay if they taught their online class as part of load. However, assuming a tenured faculty person at a state university teaches 7 three-credit courses per year and makes the average pay of $123,000 per year, plus benefits, and half of that person’s job consists of research and service, the effective pay per 3-credit class is $8,700.

People were asked to give the name of their institution; we then looked up what its sector is. Pay per class for adjuncts varies more by sector than by status.

Adjuncts at public state universities made the most, with the majority making between $4,000 and $5,000 per class. Pay at for-profits was the worst, with pay at community colleges and private non-profits about equally bad. The question was posed as “less than $2,000” or “$2,000 to $3,000.” This means that we did not sufficiently capture the number of faculty, mostly at the for-profits, who make considerably less than $2,000.

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| Sector | Pay for teaching (adjunct) per 3-credit class |
| Community colleges (n=19) | 15% make above $3,000  53% make between $2,000 -- $3000  40% make $2,000 or less |
| Public state universities (n=54) | 1 person made $8,000; 33% make $4,000 - $5,000  30% make $3,000 - $4,000  16% make $2,000- $3,000  16% made $2,000 or less |
| Private non-profit colleges and universities (n=16) | 1 person made $6800  1 person made $5500  1 person made $3,000  44% made $$2,000 - $3,000  31% made $2,000 or less |
| For-Profits (n=18) | 1 person made $3,000  33% made $2000-$3,000  66% made less than $2,000 |

A few respondents were paid per student.These appeared to be mostly classes that might have enrollment less than 10 or up to 25.

The highest-paid adjunct, who teaches at a major non-profit private university, wrote:

I work full-time at a (different institution, not a college or university). I teach a graduate course, in my area, once a year. I am encouraged to update it. No one else teaches it; the course is unique. Class size is limited to 15. The focus of the program is technology in (xxx). I was paid ($5,000 - $6,000) to design the course in one semester. Then I am paid to teach it ($6680).

This is approximately what a full-time faculty person making the low end of average full time pay would make for teaching one course, with benefits.

**Pay for writing a course**

As noted above, the majority of courses were written by full-time faculty as part of load. When adjuncts were paid for writing courses, the amount was typically $1000 or less.

**Benefits**

Access to health insurance, contributions to retirement, vacation accrual, holiday pay, and paid sick days were almost universally not provided to instructors working as adjuncts. Some received a contribution toward retirement. People who were teaching as adjuncts but had a full-time job as well said that they got their benefits through their full-time job (examples included librarians, administrators, and other outside employment in business or the arts, in addition to full-time faculty jobs).

**Overhead**

For a person who has a full-time job with an office on campus, overhead is not a cost. For the person whose income is from teaching as an adjunct, how much one gets paid has to get set against the cost of access to the internet, keeping software updated, purchasing and maintaining a computer, paying for overhead for an office including heat, electricity, a phone, etc. There are also direct costs to someone who does not have full access to a university library, whether or not that person is doing research. These can easily run onto several hundred dollars a month. Replacing a damaged or stolen computer can cost as much as someone gets paid for a whole class. Since maintaining a computer and internet service, and an office or at least a desk to work from, are essential tools of the trade, making less money than needed to cover these costs can eliminate an instructor from teaching at all.

An adjunct at a for-profit, who teaches at multiple institutions, describes getting phone calls in the middle of the night:

I am required to provide a phone number to students in addition to my university email address; in addition to the expense, since students can be globally distributed, this sometimes results in middle-of-the-night calls.

Full-time faculty get all of the above as part of the office that is provided by the school. In addition, many get laptops to travel with. Overall, online faculty who do not have full-time jobs get none of the above types of support. This does not vary by sector.

**Class size**

The typical class size for our respondents, regardless of sector, was 20-40. There were one or two who taught classes of 50-100 students. This survey did not reach anyone who was teaching a MOOC (Massive Online Open Course). Although online faculty who teach composition or who have to grade a lot of writing complained about class sizes over 20, class size was generally not given as a problem. The critical workload issue was hours per day per class for faculty teaching more than one or two classes at a time.

**Hours per day per class**

Time is the critical scarce resource for teachers. Although there was a big range of responses ranging from 1 hour per day to 6 hours per day per class, the bell curves in all sectors centered around two hours per day. This means that online faculty, whether they teach in for-profits, community colleges, private non-profits or state colleges and universities, typically spend 2 hours per day per class. This includes weekends, or 14 hours per week.

**How the for-profit business model shapes the implementation of online teaching**

Tamar Lewin quotes a professor who had previously been enthusiastic about “the democratization of higher education through the global MOOCs”: “…I’ve gotten more cautious as my colleagues talk about what it might mean for jobs at public universities” (Lewin May 2 New York Times A12).

The overarching problem that exposes higher education overall to driving down pay, giving up control of the art of teaching and shedding jobs through this technology, which simultaneously has the potential to democratize, is understood to be the revenue-driven business model within which it is being implemented. This model enrolls students without providing for adequate preparation, takes advantage of aggressively marketed loan programs, and multiplies classes to fill demand while suppressing labor costs as much as possible. The tuition-chasing business model puts pressure on all faculty, from the most advantaged to the least, to do more with less. However, faculty who are frustrated with the way they have to do their work often blame whatever comes to hand: students, individual employers, or the technology itself.

Those who blame students say the students come unprepared, don’t write well enough to communicate primarily in writing, don’t understand the fast schedule of compressed courses, don’t know what a peer-reviewed journal is, can’t work independently, etc. Lack of preparation undoubtedly explains the high drop out or attrition rate that many teachers report. People who blame the students often comment that their institution is going after enrollment at the price of selectivity, in order to bring in tuition revenue.

An adjunct teaching at a community college as well as other institutions wrote:

[My] course is effective when used correctly. Many students enrolled in my online courses have not been properly advised about what online learning is like and should not be taking online courses (Ex: they have no time management skills, do not know basic computing, have disabilities which make working a computer difficult, do not have reliable internet access, etc.). Although I have experience teaching 200-level literature and creative writing courses, as an adjunct at this particular institution, I am only offered online freshman comp courses.

And:

Students in these courses are primarily adult learners with a poor foundation in writing and critical thinking. They are inadequately prepared by overworked colleagues.

And:

My students mostly come from disadvantaged backgrounds. A major struggle every semester is their ability to afford/have access to textbooks, working computers, and internet. It impedes course progress and retention but there is not much I can do about that. If one of my online courses does not "make," I am given no advance warning, and all the site-specific course building work I've done is taken down. I have no ability to save my work or recoup lost time.

Others blame individual administrative regimes at their colleges, describing them as incompetent or even vindictive. An adjunct who teaches at a branch of the for-profit DeVry wrote:

Here's something unique and unusual - or maybe not. A few years ago, I was hired as a Visiting Professor for DeVry University. I was told that I'd be teaching two courses per term, my job was more or less permanent, and that I'd be making roughly $28,800 per year for my efforts. (Never mind that there was no salary increase from moving up from adjunct to Visiting Prof; never mind that I've worked there for seven years with no salary increase whatsoever). Then, one day I had a question about how to grade a student paper. I e-mailed my boss. It was winter break. I never heard from her. I honestly don't remember now how many times I e-mailed her, but I saved the e-mails. A month later, I am reprimanded for "never" grading the student's paper. I was able to produce the string of e-mails for both her and her superiors. My "punishment" (which was supposed to last 8 weeks) was being reduced to one class per term. I've been enduring that punishment for the last year now. I've also been told (via several mass e-mails to all faculty) not to ask about getting more classes, etc. This is not the same DeVry that I began working for seven years ago. They are a whole different animal now.

Some blame the technology. They may be critical of the platforms purchased by their institutions. One of our respondents, a tenure-track faculty member at a Southern university, said,

My university serves the non-traditional student and we are finding that these students do not benefit from these courses but the administration keeps filling them up. The failure rate in the online courses have been as high as 60%. I would like to be more interactive and have more video for the students but our university has bought some of the Blackboard platform so we are limited to what we can post within the course.

All three of these – blaming the students, blaming the administration, and blaming the technology – are honest expressions of the individual teacher’s experience. However, all of these stem from the revenue-driven business models which, whether in a for-profit or not, pushes labor costs down. Jobs become bad. Faculty become skeptics, then bitter, then burnt out.

**A Day in the Life**

Using the responses from the survey, we can hypothesize an individual who functions at each of the three key points along the range of working conditions of online faculty life.

**The high end**

The individual at the high end of the range is the full-time faculty person, whether tenure track or contingent. This person is paid a wage that can be lived on, which probably means $80,000 a year and up, plus benefits which are usually calculated at 30% of salary. This person does not have to have another job on top of his or her full-time job. This person may teach three to five classes per semester. He may get release time to write a class, or he may be paid to write it. This person is assisted by research assistants, curriculum designers and technology staff. The development of the course may count toward tenure as if it was a book. The focus for this person is primarily on the quality of the student experience. Some of them, who are effectively the employers of adjuncts, identify primarily with the administration.

A tenured faculty member responded to our survey by offering to speak both for himself/herself and the adjuncts that do the rest of the teaching:

I am chair of the department, which relies on adjunct faculty for the rest of the teaching. As far as I know, adjunct faculty members are not members of the MLA and as a result would not have been invited to take this survey. My answers combine both my own perspective and that of the instructors who teach in my department.

Adjunct faculty are in fact members of the MLA and many are involved in an adjunct caucus within the MLA. But this comment demonstrates the distance, cultural and otherwise, between this department chair and the people who do “the rest of the teaching.”

Another one of our respondents, a contingent full-time faculty person at a small non-profit college, spoke about how he/she managed to accommodate the deficiencies of her overall program:

Graduate level writing and research skills [are] sometimes lacking although they are supposed to go through a course that refreshes/teaches that stuff. Writing Intensive course requires use of Writing Intensive Course rubric grading for at least one paper, which has good and bad points in terms of paper evaluation and grading and communication with students in order to help them improve. I use turnitin.com for all paper submissions to catch plagiarism/internet copying and also to provide lots of comments and a clear rubric the students can see. Library access for research sometimes difficult since not everything is online yet and remote students may not be able to get printed materials easily or in time (they tend to wait til the last minute). Sometimes text-only interaction can be hard to interpret -- tone/attitude is occasionally tough for both students and teacher.

While faculty with full-time jobs may be skeptical of the impact of the business model and critical of the quality of their online programs, they tend to be aggressive about gathering resources from the institution in order to make the classes work as well as possible. They can choose to automate grading or eliminate an assignment. They are not as likely to be pressed for time (unless they are doing overload or moonlighting) and they have access to the professional benefits of the jobs. This person seems to be able to set his/her own standards for how to get the work done.

**The adjunct at one institution: subsidizing a teaching career**

The individual who is does not have a full-time job and teaches as an adjunct at only one institution may, with two classes a semester at $4,000 per class, make $20,000 a year before taxes. However, this person may not be not relying on this as a sole source of income. We assumed that someone who reported teaching one or two classes at one institution fits this category. This person may be retired with a pension, for example, or have a spouse with a good job, income from investments or a job with time demands that are manageable. Compared to the adjunct who is teaching many courses at many different institutions, this person has relatively flexible time constraints and can spend more or less time on a class depending on the demands of the class. While he or she carries the whole overhead of the technology, including paying for the computer, the internet access, any software upgrades that are necessary, he or she has some cushion between the job and survival. If a class does not “make,” it’s not the end of the world.

Nonetheless, these people feel excluded from a professional life. They do not have access to the resources of the institution. He or she has no access to subsidized professional development and may not have good access to a library. They are painfully aware of a lack of respect.

An adjunct teaching at a private non-profit wrote:

I don't know if it is unique but I feel like the bottom line is getting tuition money. The school would like to do right by the students but that is secondary (or worse). It is probably growing faster than it can handle and it is making mistakes. For example, they didn't tell me about two of the classes they assigned to me--taking my course load from 3 to 5 classes--I had to find out on my own. The system generated two additional classes automatically and the school did not even tell me they existed.

Another adjunct teaching only one class wrote:

Little positive feedback. No adjunct guide. Mostly have to guess as to what is wanted but treated unfairly if something arises and the supervisor does not like it. I have EXTENSIVE field experience in my discipline but often treated as if I am part of the temporary janitorial staff. Director does not like constructive criticism on course development and status or improvement. Not offered courses such as FERPA or others so have to guess as to what is right and not right. Attempts to be a part of the full-time team are encouraged but then met with full resistance when exercised. Have never seen evals in any course that I have taught. Clearly spies on me when I visit the campus bookstore, clinic, other places and then tells me what she was told that I said or did not say while on campus. It is a strange place.

**An adjunct teaching at multiple institutions**

The most difficult professional life is led by the person who teaches five, six or more classes at two, three or more institutions. This is what, for face-to-face classes, was called a “freeway flyer.” This person is trying to create a professional academic life out of multiple jobs. For this person, both time and money are scarce resources and there is no margin for error. A computer virus or a loss of internet access can be fatal to keeping up with the pace of a class. Buying books or subscribing to journals is out of the question. The pressure of trying to earn a living forces this person to accept as many classes as possible, add as many students as will sign up, and control time spent on each class to the greatest extent possible.

One of our respondents, an example of this situation, said:

Quite frankly I lose track of the mission of the institution because I am just trying to keep up with the work of getting classes, looking for work, getting welfare subsidies to get heat, etc.

Another respondent said:

The student number is very high for a composition course for a low amount of pay. I am paid less for the online course than I am in the classroom, but I work more. I do not have a technology subsidy and I have access to IT [support] but it is by email. I get so little per course that I have to teach 4-5 to make it and then several outside curses (also comp) that pay nearly three times as much per course. The pay is the biggest issue, with no health benefits.

No discussion of “quality” in online learning can afford to overlook the extremes of inequality in working conditions under which the work of online teaching is done. The concern of the full-time tenured faculty that his or her course will get passed along to someone who is simultaneously teaching four or five other classes and has to maximize efficiency above all is justified.

The lower down the status scale one goes, the more disturbing the tension between doing “indispensable work” and having no control over that work. At a certain point, the tension may be experienced as burnout, but the person has to keep teaching in order to live. As an adjunct teaching at multiple institutions said,

I am not willing to put in too much effort any more. I was spending too much time trying to include written assignments, but there didn't seem to be any reward for doing so. There is no tenured person in my area (sociology); 91% of the instructors are adjuncts.

And:

I perform according to my pay. I'm just that burnt out. I probably put in an hour three days a week and eight hours one day a week when I'm grading.

Institutions, by increasingly using proprietary curricula, automated grading systems, black-box evaluations, cooperate with this burnout.

**Next steps**

Most faculty push-back, at least that which makes headline news, is against the imposition of MOOCs into existing curriculum, as for example the pushback from the San Jose philosophy department faculty who are resisting offering a Udacity course on Social Justice. This push-back, however, shines a light on the working conditions that exist across the whole spectrum of status in higher education. When tenured faculty express concern that their courses, developed with the support of university resources, cannot be effectively taught by someone who lacks those resources (an adjunct working from home and teaching multiple other classes at multiple institutions, for example), that concern is really about working conditions across the industry. Fear of loss of control of the work at one end of the spectrum is actual loss of control at the other end.

The unionized places are certainly better, but even they are suffering. Even there, the power to resist gets fragmented by extremes of inequality. However, full-time and adjunct alike, over all the respondents in this survey, are aware of this. The “mentors” described in the New York Times article by Tamar Lewin, working the night shift for Udacity and getting the “aha” moments, may very likely be the future of faculty in higher education. For good reason, therefore faculty across the board are concerned and unhappy both about control of the work itself and other educational issues, and about pay and compensation. They are also hungry for collegial contact, including online contact. They are ready for next steps.

Surveys can gather information but they are not organizing. What is needed now is a commitment to organizing that is bottom-up, regardless of status, “local” in all the new ways that online instruction itself is “local” but networked, recognizes the material realities of online instruction, defies the corporate culture that the tuition-chasing business model represents, embraces all faculty, appeals to courage rather than fear, and takes for granted that teaching is worthy of respect in and for itself, regardless of how much the person who is doing it is getting paid.

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This report will be posted on the COCAL International website (<http://cocalinternational.org/>). It was presented at the UALE conference in Toronto in April 2013.

This draft of this report was prepared for a conference in Boston, April 13, 2013, at which contingent faculty throughout the Boston area came together to think about organizing. The conference is sponsored by SEIU and anticipates bringing in faculty from more than 20 colleges (<http://www.boston.com/yourcampus/news/babson/2013/04/adjuncts_from_more_than_20_boston-a>)

There is a real possibility that out of this conference might come a metro organizing strategy, where organizing is accomplished across multiple employers (which matches the actual working conditions of adjuncts who teach at multiple places) and is centered in some physical place (along the lines of a workers center) or even a virtual workers center. People who join in to this effort therefore become part of a regional struggle, not focused just on their own employer or employers, but on the conditions of people like themselves and including themselves, across the regional industry.